

Mass in Motion: Stories from the Field

Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice with Healthy Dining New Bedford

Today, families are consuming more and more meals outside the home. Restaurant foods tend to be higher in fat and calories, and are often larger in portion size than meals we eat at home. These foods may contribute to the problem of overweight and obesity in Massachusetts. As obesity rates continue to grow in New Bedford and across the state, community members decided to take action.

With its variety of popular ethnic and American restaurants in mind, the New Bedford Mass in Motion (NB-MIM) team set out to create Healthy Dining New Bedford: a voluntary program for restaurant owners and managers to introduce menu options that promote healthy eating. NB-MIM collected information on rationale, experiences, changes to menus, and impact on business from healthy dining programs in other cities. The team used this information to form the goals of the program:

1. reward restaurants for creating healthier options
2. provide healthy dining experiences for its residents
3. attract tourism and visitors to New Bedford

To increase awareness of the program, NB-MIM worked with local partners (the Mayor's Office, Health Department, Southcoast Health System and the Economic Development Council) to insert a letter, application, and brochure into the annual citywide restaurant permit mailing. Healthy Dining restaurants will need to have valid permits and no health code violations; comply with the Smoke-Free Workplace law; and submit a copy of their adult and kid's menus with healthy options.

To reward restaurant owners for offering lighter fare, Healthy Dining restaurants will be promoted in local websites, newspapers, cable access programs and social media channels such as Facebook. Additionally, restaurants will receive a decal (sticker) to put on their restaurant windows recognizing their efforts.

The campaign launched in May of 2011, and after one short month a total of ten restaurants applied to the program. There have been many other unanticipated offers from the community that will only serve to ensure the program's success, including:

Healthy Dining Examples:

- low fat or skim milk
- vegetables instead of french fries
- real fruit juice or water in place of sugary drinks such as soda
- dishes in smaller portions
- healthy options on kid's menus
- the "half meal-to-go" option



- a mini-grant of \$500 from the Greater New Bedford Allies for Health and Wellness for printing costs
- a contact number at City Hall to direct restaurant owners and managers to appropriate resources
- a voluntary local dietician volunteered to review and approve incoming menus

New Bedford Mass in Motion and partners continue to receive applications and look forward to evaluating the program based on positive feedback from residents and impact on sales.

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